

**JOINT PRESS RELEASE**  
**Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes (CSKT)**  
**U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (FWS)**

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**Tribes and Fish & Wildlife Service Announce Plans to  
Negotiate Joint Management of Bison Range**

During a meeting held in Polson, MT, on February 20, 2003, the Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service agreed on principles and timelines for negotiations on an Annual Funding Agreement that would allow the tribes to manage the National Bison Range and affiliated refuges on the Flathead Reservation.

“There is clear legal authority for federal units to be managed by tribes when they have a historic, geographic and cultural link to the unit,” said Interior Deputy Assistant Secretary Paul Hoffman, who leading the Interior Department negotiation team. Interior also has clear legal guidance that requires a Fish & Wildlife Service manager to remain and Fish & Wildlife Service concurrence on inherently federal responsibilities. “The refuges will remain federal assets, they will continue to be managed for the wildlife for which they were established and public access will continue as long as that is consistent with the refuge purposes,” Hoffman added.

“We are happy to begin the negotiation process and we are encouraged about the opportunities for tribal management of these refuges which lie within the Flathead Reservation and have clear cultural and historic ties to our tribes,” said tribal chair Fred Matt. Matt also recognized the importance of public input in the negotiation process. “We will make all negotiated agreements available for public comment and input,” Matt added.

Consistent with that commitment, Matt released the CSKT/FWS Preliminary Discussions and Draft Plan of Action which was developed during the February 20, 2003, meeting in Polson. He also released the Draft Public Input Plan of Action which represents the action articulated in Goal 1 of the original Plan of Action. These documents can also be accessed at: <http://mountain-prairie.fws.gov/CSKT-FWS-Negotiation>

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Web Site for Comments:

<http://mountain-prairie.fws.gov/CSKT-FWS-Negotiation>

Attachments:

CSKT/FWS Preliminary Discussions and Draft Plan of Action

Draft Public Input Plan of Action